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UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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DP/PROJECTS/7186

ENGLISH

APPROVAL OF UNDP ASSISTANCE TO A PROJECT OF LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, THAILAND, VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA

IPF:(1992-96) $150 000 000

(RAS/92/160)-Support for Programme Activities of the Mekong Committee

Date of approval by the AC:[1/]	4 December 1991
Expected duration:	Five years
Proposed executing agency:	Government
Government implementing agency:	Interim Mekong Committee through the Mekong Secretariat
Proposed UNDP contribution:	$3 919 000 Source of funds: Regional IPF
Total UNDP budget:	$3 919 000

Project background

The Committee for Co-ordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin (the Mekong Committee) was established in 1957 under the auspices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) as an inter-governmental organization, with the Governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam as members. Since 1978 the Committee has functioned under an interim status without the participation of Cambodia. At its request, the Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC) is in the process of being re-admitted to fully participate in the Committee.

The Committee's mandate relates geographically to the lower Mekong basin which covers the main part of Cambodia and Laos, the east, northeast and northern parts of Thailand, and the central highlands and the Mekong delta in Vietnam. The basin, with a total population of about 52 million (1990), is still one of the poorest regions of the world, in spite of its considerable resources and development potential. The annual per capita income in various areas of the basin ranges from (US)$ 190 to 540 (1990).

The current mandate of the Committee is to achieve sustainable development of water and water-related resources in the lower Mekong basin, to the benefit of its population without generating adverse conditions which may affect future resources development or lead to deteriorating natural and human conditions. In accordance with this mandate the Committee has placed particular emphasis on basin-wide development activities, including the development of the Mekong mainstream and its major tributaries. The Committee has specifically addressed the subject areas of hydropower, irrigation, flood control and bank protection, forestry, fisheries, watershed management, and river works and transport. Environmental socio-economic and human resources development, as well as the transfer of advanced technology programmes, constitute an integral and increasingly important part of the Committee's work. Data collection as a basis for integrated basin-wide short-, medium- and long-term planning constitutes another core function of the Committee.

[1/] This Fact Sheet reflects the status of the project/revision at the time it was approved by the Action Committee; modifications to the project/revision may have occurred subsequently.

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UNDP has consistently provided institutional and programme support to the Mekong Committee, in the amount of over (US)$47 million up to end 1990. In the last decade, with the upsurge of other donors' interest in the programmes of the Committee, UNDP's assistance has been gradually scaled down and in 1990, UNDP's direct contributions to the Committee represented only about 17 percent of the Committee's institutional, and a mere two percent of its programme expenditures.

UNDP's assistance to the Mekong Committee has been frequently reviewed by accountability, audit and evaluation missions. Since 1983 seven major UNDP missions of varying size, scope and purpose have been carried out, the last one in June 1991. Although bilateral and other multilateral assistance has become an increasingly significant funding base for the Committee, UNDP's support remains critical and of high strategic value to enable the Committee to fulfill its role of a unified and neutral facilitator and manager of programmes. Limited UNDP's assistance remains appropriate because of the international character of the Committee' activities, the need for the prestige and the neutrality attached to UNDP support, especially in a difficult political environment, and the compatibility of the Committee's work with UNDP's programme strategies and goals.

Bilateral assistance is based on quite different premises than UNDP assistance and requires the integration of each donor's often short-term, economic development agenda to the overall work programme of the Committee. Occasional conditions prohibiting the use of funds for certain purposes can cause fundamental problems. The short-term involvement by several donors also makes long-term planning for the Committee's core functions difficult. It is, therefore, important that UNDP support be available to fill these gaps, be flexible in nature and permit the integrity of the Committee's core work to be maintained in more than a year-by-year manner.

Description of project

The development objective of the project is to facilitate the Committee's task to achieve environmentally and socially sound sustainable development of the common water resources of the lower Mekong basin for the benefit of its people. The immediate objectives of the project are to: (a) update and improve the Committee's and counterpart agencies competence with regard to legal, organizational, financial, technical and other aspects of regional co-operation in order to advise its members and the donor community; (b) plan and implement a number of well-structured, medium-and-long term training programmes for riparian (national) personnel in order to further strengthen the member countries' human resources base and to accelerate the riparianization of the Secretariat; (c) explore avenues of closer technical, scientific and formal cooperation with the upstream riparian countries of China and Myanmar; and (d) ensure continued impartial management of all development, financial, administrative and fund-raising activities in accordance with recognized international rules and procedures.

Inputs

UNDP will provide the services of an executive agent (60 work-months) and a Director of Finance and Administration (60 work-months) (both are currently UNDP staff members seconded to the Mekong Secretariat); 71 work-months of international short-term consultants, and 215 work-months of national experts; for three subcontracts for studies; office equipment; training activities for riparian staff; and miscellaneous costs.

Financial data

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Personnel	2 935 000
Subcontract	300 000
Training	604 000
Equipment	40 000
Miscellaneous	40 000
Total	3 919 000

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